

Now, the parade organizers did not know me or care about this issue, but the family who kindly put me up there, after my stay in the hospital for dehydration, happened to be good friends of the parade chairman. It was like that every step of the way—always just the right person at just the right moment.

It continued across the country. Let me remind you that last Sunday it rained heavily in Washington, and last Monday it was very cold and windy, and Tuesday, when a nice day would be good for the big march across town to the Capitol steps, why, the weather here was a perfect springlike day.

The blessings have been uncountable.

I do not mean to suggest that the Lord makes doing the right thing easy. My walk was not easy. But he seems to clear the field for you when you are ready to do serious battle. He does appreciate, I think, our moments of courage and He does not mind showing His hand at such times.

Finally, let me make a spiritual note regarding the issue itself.

Is it not so that we are charged in this life with doing God's work where we might? Are we not the keepers of our brothers and sisters? Are we not to be agents for justice and equality and kindness? Surely we cannot fulfill our high role if we do not have the power to manage our collective resources. Surely, only a free and empowered people can properly take care of one another. If we allow ourselves to lose our ability to manage our considerable common wealth to best address the great needs of our people, we abdicate our earthly responsibilities to our God, do we not?

If we allow the greedy and the inhuman elements to steal away from us our self-government, because we did not have the energy or the courage to fight for it and to use it as a tool of our love and our wisdom, how shall we answer for that?

Is campaign finance reform a religious issue? It is one of the central religious issues of our times, and I of course speak to the condition of the entire world, not just our few states. If we are to do the right things for our people and for the lovely home given us by God, then we must, as free adults, have the power to do what is right. I do not mean that churches and states should mix: it is enough that our civic values, which we all share with only a few arguments around the edges, are informed by our deeper beliefs in the equality of people and basic rights of all God's creations.

#### PENSION COVERAGE

#### HON. SAM GEJDENSON

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 9, 2000*

Mr. GEJDENSON. Mr. Speaker, America's workers have made the record 107 month economic expansion possible. They deserve to reap the rewards of our national prosperity. They deserve income security, and in particular, they deserve to have a pension and the ability to save for retirement. Approximately 51 million workers—about half the workforce—lack pension coverage of any kind. For these workers, retirement security is very precarious and their economic future more uncertain.

This Congress has an obligation to expand pension coverage to boost retirement security for all Americans. We know what will make a difference to millions of workers. We should, for example, increase the portability of dif-

ferent types of pensions by allowing employees to more easily roll-over these assets when they change jobs. We should provide tax relief to help small businesses starting a pension plan. We should reduce vesting periods. These are common-sense steps, and steps that we are all ready and willing to take. In fact, more than 100 members of this body have joined me sponsoring the Retirement Security Act, which would implement each of these options, and more.

The bill before us today, H.R. 3932, takes some steps in the right direction on pensions. Regrettably, it shortchanges average working men and women who need the most help in saving for retirement. Instead, it sweetens the pension pot for the wealthiest employees, those who have little to worry about with respect to their own retirement. The implicit, unsubstantiated promise of H.R. 3832 is that highly-compensated employees, who presumably have decision-making authority about pension coverage, will expand pension coverage for lower-wage employees as they attempt to take advantage of the bill's enhanced contribution and disbursement features for themselves. It is an \$18 billion gamble that may not pay off for most workers. The only certainty is that the highly compensated will benefit.

According to an analysis prepared by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, of the \$18 billion in pension benefits in H.R. 3832, 91.5% would accrue to the top 10 percent of earners, those with annual incomes above \$89,000. At the same time, the lowest 60% of earners would receive less than 1% of the benefits in the package. To make matters worse, the Center's analysis shows that the increasing income thresholds for determining contributions to pension plans from \$170,000 to \$200,000, employers can save money by reducing pension coverage for lower wage employees. Indeed, if an employer contributes a flat percentage of each employee's pay to a pension, he can continue to reward the highest paid workers with the same dollar contribution while reducing the percentage of pay contributed to each worker at the lower end of the pay-scale.

I believe that we would better direct these resources toward middle- and lower-income workers and toward small business that want to provide retirement security to their employees. My bill accomplishes these goals by shortening vesting periods, providing credits to small businesses that start plans, and boosting pension equity for women. The President has proposed a series of pension and savings initiatives that would enhance retirement savings. He proposes tax credits that would encourage small businesses to establish a pension plan and to match employee contributions. He also proposes tax credits for financial institutions that establish retirement savings accounts for lower-income workers who do not have pension coverage at work.

Some in this body think passing these pension provisions today gets Congress off the hook in terms of real reform. It does not. I stand here to say that our job is far from finished when it comes to helping middle- and low-income workers save for retirement. I hope that we can all continue to work on this issue and pass comprehensive legislation expanding size pension coverage to every American.

#### BLACK HISTORY MONTH HONOREES

#### HON. NICK LAMPSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 9, 2000*

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor local citizens from the 9th District of Texas who were chosen during Black History Month for their work. While the dedication of African-American leaders is well-known throughout the United States, local citizens, right here in the Southeast Gulf Coast region, are just as important to ensuring equal rights for all Texans. Last month I asked members of the communities in the 9th District to nominate individuals for my "Unsung Heroes" award that gives special recognition to those unsung heroes, willing workers, and individuals who are so much a part of our nation's rich history. Recipients were chosen because they embodied a giving and sharing spirit, and had made a contribution to our nation.

These individuals have not only talked the talk, but they have walked the walk. They have worked long and hard for equal rights in their churches, schools, and in their communities. While their efforts may not make the headlines every day, their pioneering struggle for equality and justice is nevertheless vital to our entire region. This region of Southeast Texas is not successful in spite of our diversity; we are successful because of it.

Please join me in recognizing and congratulating these community leaders for their support of bringing justice and equality to Southeast Texas. It is leaders like these men and women that continue to be a source of pride not only during Black History Month, but all year long. The winners of this years "Unsung Heroes" award are:

Ms. Sharon Lewis, Mrs. Eslen Brown Love, Constable Terry Petteway, Mr. Alex Pratt, Miss June Pinckney Ross, Ms. Ann Simmons, Mr. James Steadham, Mrs. Maggie Williams, Mrs. Valencia Huff Arceneaux, Mr. T.D. Armstrong, Mr. Melton Bell, Mr. Craig Bowie, Ms. Linda Brooks, Dr. Lisa Cain, Mrs. Izola Collins, Mr. Paul A. Cox, Pastor Marvin C. Delaney, Mrs. Idella Duncan, Mrs. Gloria Ellisor, Mayor Leon Evans, Ms. Vera Bell Gary, Ms. Wilina Gatson, Mrs. Ann Grant, Mr. Deyossie Harris, Mrs. Edna Jensen, Mr. Cleveland Nisby, Mr. Collis Cannon, Reverend Ransom Howard, Mrs. Hargie Faye Savoy, Judge Theodore Johns, Mr. Eddie Seniguar, Mrs. Marie Hubbard, Judge Paul Brown, Mr. Lewis Hodge, Mrs. Mandy Plummer, Mrs. Fabiola B. Small, Dr. Rosa Smith-Williams, Mr. Tobe Duhon, Rev. Isaiah Washington, Sr., Mrs. Barbara Hannah-Keys, Ms. Nina Gail Stelley, Mr. Herman Hudson, Mrs. Lillian M. LeBlanc, Dr. Carroll Thomas, Dr. William T.B. Lewis, Mr. Raymond Johnson, Mr. Amos Evans, State Rep. Al Price, and Rev. G.W. Daniels.

Mr. Speaker, the recipients of the "Unsung Heroes" award are dedicated and hardworking individuals who have done so much for their neighbors and for this nation as a whole. Today, I stand to recognize their spirit and to say that I am honored to be their Representative.